Reference Document for the Departmental Scholarship Committee Graduate Student Representative

Compiled by Yonathan Uriel and Pauline Deschodt, 2018

The Department Scholarship Committee is currently composed of:
Executive Chair: Tony Williams
Staff Rep: Debbie Sandher
Faculty: Vicki Marlatt, Gerhard Gries, and Jonathan Moore
Graduate Reps: Yonathan Uriel and Serena Wong

Roles of Committee Members

Executive Chair

The Chair is responsible for:
   a) Notifying members of the Committee when award rankings open, and when award rankings are due
   b) Compiling rankings from all members of the Committee and submitting a final ranking to the granting agency/Department
   c) Organizing and chairing Committee meetings, which only take place if there are large discrepancies between rankings from different Committee members

Staff Rep

The Staff Rep is responsible for:
   a) Collecting hard copies of award applications (there are only a handful of awards which still require hard copy applications, the Chair will let you know when this is the case)
   b) Making and distributing ranking spreadsheet templates
   c) Submitting a ranking for each award to the Executive Chair

Faculty

Each faculty member is responsible for submitting their own award rankings to the Executive Chair.

Grad Reps

Graduate Reps are responsible for:
   a) Submitting a joint ranking for each award to the Executive Chair
   b) Reporting DSC news to the Graduate Caucus

The Grad Reps are expected to base our rankings on the **terms of reference** (TOR) given for each award, but every member of the Committee is allowed to make their own ranking rubric for each award.

GA3 System

Award applications are accessed through the same online system grad students use to submit applications. In order to access awards, you need to have special "reviewer permission" enabled on your GA3 account. This is done by Rachel Dawson, in the Grad Studies office (r_dawson@sfu.ca), via email request.

Once reviewer permission is turned on you cannot apply for awards until it is disabled. To have the regular student permissions switched back on, you need to email Rachel again. There might be a lag time of a few days while you wait for permissions to be turned on or off, so it's best to be proactive about this.

Once you have reviewer permission, a new tab should appear on your GA3 dashboard titled "My Reviews". All award applications which you have permission to view should appear there.

Ranking Awards

As mentioned above, we are given a great deal of autonomy when it comes to designing our rankings. Though the Grad Reps collectively provide a single ranking for each award, in the past we've each made our own independent rankings, then submitted the average rankings to the Chair.

If a student is applying for a scholarship or award, they still submit a ranking for the award but omit themselves.

Award Types

Scholarships can be grouped based on their funding source. Below are some tips on how to rank specific types of awards.

1. Internal (BASS) Awards

Internal awards are funded by the Biology department. All the funding for these awards comes from a single fund, the BASS, which is renewed on an annual basis by the Dean og Graduate Studies. The DSC has total discretion on how to allocate these funds. Internal awards include TMRAs, GIRTAs, the Department Graduate Entrance Scholarships, Graduate Fellowships, President's PRS, and the Special Grad Entrance Scholarship. We tend to be very generous with these awards; as long as students meet the minimum GPA requirements we give out as many as we can every year.

2. Private Awards

Private awards are funded by private donors, usually through an estate or endowment fund. The DSC will typically narrow down applicants to a short, ranked list of students (ie. Top 3) for donors to consider. Typically, these private donors only give out one or two awards each year, so we have to be careful that we meet their TOR as exactly as possible. If we send ill-suited applicants, they can choose to refuse to give out an award at all!

3. Other External Awards

External awards can also be funded by other committees at SFU (President's PhD Scholarship is funded by the Dean of Grad Studies office), or by government bodies (NSERC funds both the CGSM and PGSM awards). These bodies typically accept nominations from any eligible students, so we'll rank everyone who meets the TOR and send them all in a ranked list. It's also very important to meet the TOR for these awards as exactly as possible; for example, NSERC prefers applicants with high GPA over applicants with a good publication/presentation record. If you ever have questions about how to interpret TORs, don't hesitate to email the Executive Chair.

Time Commitment

The Grad Rep position is a two-year commitment. Reps have overlapping terms, so there are never two new Grad Reps voted in at the same time (this is one big advantage of taking this Caucus position!)

The DSC is only active when we have awards to rank. There are various small awards scattered throughout the year, but the bulk of our work is devoted to ranking:
   a) Graduate Fellowships, in April
   b) Private Awards, in early June
   c) TMRA (Travel and Minor Research Award), GIRTA (Graduate International Travel and Research Award), and President's PhD Scholarships, offered in May and October.
   d) NSERC CGSM and PGSM awards.

The Summer semester is the busiest for Grad Reps. If you know you will be away and unable to rank awards during the Summer semester, you should not run for this position. Although awards can be ranked remotely, since all applications are available through the GA3 system, it is likely that the DSC will need to meet on campus to discuss the rankings for certain awards. Additionally, a Grad Rep cannot rank an award for which they have applied, so if one Grad Rep is unavailable to rank an award competition and the second Rep applies for the award, the Grad Caucus effectively loses their vote for that competition.